



The South India CHURCHMAN

The Magazine of the Church of South India

AUGUST 1986

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AUGUST 1986

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25 Years Ago!

The Women's Fellowship in Punganur has gone on having regular meetings on Saturdays and visiting Hindu homes and distributing handbills once a month. We have followed for our study—'Lessons on Christian Home' and later the book 'Christ in our Homes' by Carol Graham. Every member takes leadership in the meetings and the discussions have been free and worthwhile. One new feature is the building up of a library from which the women can borrow books. We have been able to procure some small books and pamphlets and we hope to improve it as time goes on. Christmas was drawing near and we were turning our attention to sewing garments for little children in the villages.

Village school teachers are holding meetings and are following the same book for *Bible Study*. They are trying to get the women to be ready to take the pledge and join the Women's Fellowship. The conferences have done a great deal to influence the village women by the testimony of these that attended it.

—Churchman 1951

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Solidarity with the Victims of Apartheid

On the 16th of June 1986, most of the Christian world that still has compassion in the heart and concern for basic human rights, had observed the South Africa Day coinciding with the 10th Anniversary of the Soweto massacres. Many heart throbbings were raised in prayer for the earliest ending of the trauma of suffering and agony of over 24 million black brothers and sisters under the heartless and repressive regime of about 4 million of white minority. These prayers were to join the cry of the millions around the world for quickest dismantling of the diabolical system of apartheid in South Africa. The deepening crisis resulting from killing of thousands of innocent people,—men, women and children sharpens the urgency for finding an authentically peaceful alternative to this madness of violence unleashed by the white racist rulers. It is the State violence that started the spiral of violence in a chain reaction from organisations like the African National Congress and others who seek to raise the voice for the voiceless and defend the defenceless.

About an year ago, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), under the leadership of the Indian Prime Minister had taken strong initiatives for non-violent alternative to the South African problem, by calling for mandatory economic sanctions against the Pretoria regime by the nations of the World that genuinely seek justice with peace for the oppressed in the world. It is ironic that these NAM nations had grown into deeper solidarity with the victims of racism in South Africa months before the famous **Harare Declaration** of December 1985 by which the World Christian community addressed those democratic nations like the USA, Britain and West Germany with their long history of Christian background, demanding such solidarity for the victims of apartheid.

And again, more recently, it is the patently non-Christian members of the Commonwealth nations that have still kept the initiative in their hands lending still greater support and solidarity with the victims of apartheid. In contrast, the same Western nations consistently and unashamedly throw their weight with the racist rulers in South Africa. They continue to justify and legitimise their enlightened self-interest through hair-splitting arguments about “punitive” sanctions and “pressurizing” sanctions, and about reforming apartheid. This is all too far removed from being in solidarity with the suffering masses, as advocated by the World Christian conscience. “Unjust Laws”, says Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, “cannot be reformed, but they must be abolished”. After discerning the political mood of the World Community, Rajiv Gandhi went further to say, “Apartheid must be dismantled, and it will be dismantled, . . . But the question is only how soon can it be dismantled.” The lesson transparent from such prophetic utterance could only be that the Lord God of history may even call forth stones to speak and act in defence of His purposes, and in defence of His people, whose cry He has heard in the heavens.

As the well known **Kairos Document** that emanated from the sensitive Theologians of Southern Africa not long ago, had affirmed the moment of truth, the Kairos, has now come for ending of apartheid and liberation of all its victims in Southern Africa, indeed throughout the world. As Victor Hugo said, essentially that all the forces in the world are not so powerful as an idea whose time has come. Therefore as the above-mentioned prophets have all discerned the signs of our times it is urgent that the Prophetic Voice in the Indian

Church also should be raised. Should not the "righteousness" of the Christian prophets in India exceed that of the secular prophets like Rajiv Gandhi?

But then, both the Christian and secular prophets in this country at this very moment of truth and by the same token are challenged to awaken to the reality that is nothing less than apartheid existing in our own country. Can it be denied that the monster of caste discrimination and oppression in all its diabolical expressions each day is nothing different from

apartheid in South Africa? But, it takes sensitive spirit and Prophetic Courage to discern the cumulative inequalities and indescribable exploitation suffered by no less than 200 million Dalits (out-caste oppressed people or 'Harijans') in India today.

Indeed, it takes enormous compassion that Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated if the Christians and the Church in India were to follow their Saviour to join "in solidarity with the Victims of (Caste) apartheid".

REV. M. AZARIAH

Church Demands Arrest of Culprits of Karamchedu Massacres on 17th July '85

The Church of South India, Medak Diocese, today called upon the Government to immediately arrest all those involved in the Karamchedu crime, 'however rich and highly placed they may be in society', so that it might act as a 'deterrent in future and instill confidence in the minds of Harijans of Karamchedu in particular and the public in general'.

The Bishop in Medak, the Presbyters and the Christians of the Church of South India, at a special meeting held in the Wesley Church, Secunderabad, adopted another resolution unanimously, condemning the 'heinous crime committed on the innocent and defenceless people and the meaningless destruction of their properties'.

Noting that the victims of the gruesome attack were Christians, the meeting resolved to bring to the notice of the State and Centre government, the repeated and unprovoked attacks on the minority communities, including Christians and the 'subtle attempts to deprive them of their Constitutional rights'. The Church also requested the Government to 'safeguard the religious minorities from oppression and harassment'.

In another resolution, it was decided to extend all support to the government in resolving the grave situation in Karamchedu and building a community of brotherhood.

The meeting prayed to God to 'give wisdom to the leaders of our country to lead the people out of age-old oppressive social and economic structures and bring about a community of mutual respect, tolerance and national integration beginning at the village level'.

The findings of a six-member team of the Church, which visited Karamchedu, Chirala and Guntur, for an on-the-spot study of the situation, were narrated to the gathering, by Rev. T. B. Prabhakara Rao, Vice-Chairman of the diocese.

He said the brutal attack on the down-trodden people was unprovoked.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Victor Premasagar, Bishop in Medak, who led the team, speaking on the occasion, expressed resentment at the daylight murder, rape and hunting of the oppressed sections by the upper caste people in Karamchedu village.

The awakening in recent times among the hitherto discriminated and harassed sections and their demanding 'dignity and treatment as human beings' caused resentment among the upper caste people and this was the cause for incidents like burning Harijans, attacks on them and destruction of their properties.

The Bishop said the Society and the Government should work for the well-being of the oppressed sections of the society.

Rev. Justus Moni, Presbyter, Wesley Church, Secunderabad, Rev. T. V. Thiladhass, Vice-Chairman, (District Church Council); and Rev. B. Prabhakar Rao, Treasurer of the Diocese, were among those who spoke.

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Church's Concern for 'Dalit' Christians

REV. M. AZARIAH, *General Secretary*

The Catholic Bishop's Conference of India with about 115 of all their Bishops in this country meeting at Goa in April, 1986 have decided to set apart a separate Commission for the welfare of the Christians of Scheduled Castes, tribes and backward classes and set apart the Sunday after Independence day in August to be celebrated as *Justice Sunday*. In this connection they have also prepared 'a message to the members of the Churches in India'. Along with the message the CBCI Commission has prepared a Liturgical text for Justice Sunday on 17th August 1986 for the *Eucharistic celebration*. The introduction part of this thoughtfully prepared Order of Service called Holy Communion contains the following :

1. 'Today is Justice Sunday. The Sunday we want to celebrate our solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are suffering because of their faith.... Our Constitution guarantees equality of all citizens irrespective of class, caste, sex or creed. For years we have experienced however that the Christians of Scheduled Caste origin have been deprived by the Government and the society at large of many privileges which their sisters and brothers enjoy. Such discrimination against Christians of Scheduled Caste origin and others is not only against our Constitution but also a sin of injustice, an evil we want to remove from our motherland'. Then this Liturgy has a section of *Penitential rite* as below :

The Worship leader says : 'Although our unity and fellowship in Christ transcends all man-made differences, we ourselves as Christians are not free from such discrimination against our sisters and brothers of Scheduled Caste origin. Hence we begin this celebration by reviewing our life and asking for *their* pardon and God's forgiveness'. Then comes the following responsive prayers with the congregation responding with 'Lord have mercy' after each bidding.

- For our indifference to the discrimination suffered by our brothers and sisters of Scheduled Caste origin.... Lord have mercy.
- For the attitude of superiority and discrimination towards the poor and weak in our society.... Christ have mercy.
- For accepting the oppressive structures of our society and even supporting them through our silence and at times through our actions.... Lord have mercy.

The introduction part after confessing the sin of discrimination against Dalit Christians concludes with a *Prayer of the Assembly* saying

'Father you see the affliction of your people and hear their cry. You are very concerned that we live as

one great family of sisters and brothers who care for one another and share the goods of your creation. Instil in us all the citizens of our motherland a keen sense of equality and justice. Make us particularly sensitive to the plight of those of Scheduled Castes origin who are denied justice in our country because of their religion. Give us the courage and strength to join hands with them in their struggle for equality.... Amen'.

One has to study and better still, participate in the Eucharistic celebration with this special liturgy in order to appreciate and experience the spiritual renewal of one's self. Copy of this liturgy can be obtained from the CBCI Centre, 1, Ashok Place, Goldakkhana, New Delhi-1.

So, there you have as clearly indicated above, the extent of the deep concern the Catholic Church in India had come to express and involve with. The paragraph describing 'the Church's stance on Caste' in the messages to the Churches referred above, states the following : 'Caste is man-made evil. It is alien to the spirit of Christianity which professes equality of men. The Church stands for the abolition of caste. The Resolution of the All India Seminar (1969) and periodical statements of the CBCI have consistently deplored the evil of caste. The statement on Caste by the CBCI in its meeting at Trichy categorically declares, 'Caste with its consequent effects of discrimination and caste mentality has no place in Christianity. *It is in fact a denial of Christianity because it is inhuman.* It violates the God-given dignity and equality of the human person. God created man in His own image and likeness. He accepts and loves every human being without distinction'. The statement goes on to say that the *Caste mentality* is 'an outright denial of the fatherhood of God which in practice renders meaningless the brotherhood of man'.

Cardinal Picachy the then President of the CBCI highlighted the problem in the following words :

'This problem is one of the urgent ones to be tackled if the scale of Justice is to be balanced in our society.'

2. Out of the total of 25 million Christians about 15 millions are members of the Catholic church in India and it is readily admitted that at least 60% of the members are drawn from the Christians of Scheduled Castes origin. For about 440 years of Roman Catholic missionary enterprise in India since the arrival of the pioneer Francis Xavier in the 1550's the Church's Policy on Caste and Church's attitude to the outcastes (Christians of Scheduled Castes and tribal origin or the Dalits) has never been so clearly defined by the Official Roman Catholic Church

as the CBCI has done in our time. In fact under the leadership of people like the great missionary to the upper castes, Robert de-Nobili in the 17th Century, caste system in this country was taken as a cultural rather than a religious phenomenon and was accommodated uncritically within the Church. But only when the Protestant missionaries from Germany like Zeigenbalg and Plutchau landed at Tranquebar in South India had begun preaching the Gospel to the out-caste untouchables and insisted that the Children of the untouchables sit along with the missionaries to learn the Tamil language. Thus both the Church and the School were open for the first time to the victims of caste system in this land. Almost for 3 centuries now the Protestant modern missionary movement was in operation. However the Protestant policy on caste was not very much different from that of the Roman Catholics. The missionary enterprise as described in Bishop Stephen Neill's book, 'History of Christian Mission' appeared to have concentrated its work on 3 major segments of the population that yielded mass conversions.

(a) The Sudhra sub-castes

Among these groups the Catholics concentrated on the fisherfolk who lived on the coast lines from Goa down to Kanyakumari and up to Mylapore in the Eastern Coast and reaped a rich harvest of mass conversion. But the Protestant missionaries concentrated on the Nadars of the Southern most districts in Kerala and Tamilnadu which had resulted in mass movements gloriously described by Bishop Neill and others.

(b) The out-caste 'untouchables'

When the Protestant Missionaries came in the beginning of the 18th century they had to leave the entire coastal people to the charge of the Catholic missionaries for Evangelisation since vast masses of these fisherfolk and others were already received into the Catholic Church. Coming inland, the successive Protestant missionaries were confronted with the poor and dispossessed ethnic groups like the Adi-Dravidas, Adi-Andhras, Adi-Karnatakas, etc. who were not part of the Hindu caste system but were out-castes with their own names of clans and sub-tribes such as Pariyahs, Pallas, Malas, Madhikas, Holeyas, Pulayas, etc. In the course of the following 2 centuries waves of mass conversions from these ancient ethnic groups were gathered not only by the Protestant denominations but also by the Catholic Church that had reached inland beyond the coastal regions of South India. It is from among these most oppressed communities now described variously as Harijans and Scheduled Castes or Dalits that the Protestant missionaries could gain about 80% of its total membership and the Catholic Church about 60%.

(c) The Hill Tribal populations

During the same period of the modern missionary movement following the arrival of William Carey and others in Bengal in the beginning of the 19th Century both the Protestant missionaries as well as the Catholic missionaries extended their missionary outreach among the scores of Hill tribes not only in South India and the Deccan but also going up North into Orissa, Chota Nagpur, Bihar, Bengal and in a large-scale thrust into North East India particularly by the Protestant missionaries. This is how the whole Church in India today can claim almost 20% of the membership from the Tribal populations.

(d) Further, if we compare the composition of the caste map of the Indian society and that of the Indian Church it can be seen that the Church comprises only of a tiny minority of about 10% of upper caste populations, a major chunk of whom claiming to belong to the ancient Church of St. Thomas in Kerala and as an exclusive community of Syrian Christians.

3. Thus the picture emerges that the Indian Church today comprises of 4 major and distinct segments within the community of one faith. The interrelationships between and among these 4 segments confessing the one Lord, one Baptism and one faith seem to be incapable of achieving or witnessing to one fellowship as members of the same Body of Christ. This incapacity for fellowship clearly arises from the attitudes to caste held by the different segments. Each segment seem to be affirming and holding on to the same old attitude of caste that they had carried or brought into the Church, changing not even an iota from their former attitudes. The same unconscious structure of beliefs regarding caste that continue to dominate the different segments of population in the society at large outside the Church are continued also inside the Church.

Caste mentality and caste consciousness among the different segments of Christians in India had not been questioned or challenged nor critically exposed for so long but had been permitted to be perpetuated by legitimising it as a cultural rather than a sinful religious dimension of life. It is this mistaken approach to caste by the Christian enterprise is what the Catholic church now wants to correct and expose. Hence the caste mentality is described by the CBCI statement as being 'alien to the spirit of Christianity which professes equality of men' and as being 'outright denial of the fatherhood of God which in practice renders meaningless the brotherhood of man'.

The dominant view in the Protestant Missionary Movement during the past Three centuries on caste discrimination within the Church was recently explained at a Seminar by Dr. Saral Chatterjee, Director of the CISRS in Delhi. He pointed out that even the various missionary conferences in their decadal meetings in the second half of the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th century have all tended to accept the view of the upper caste converts that caste is a *cultural* phenomenon. It is this attitude which is reflected both in the theological and missionary literature in India that needs to be exposed urgently.

4. The evil of the Caste system claims that the Hindu beliefs of cycles of birth and the doctrine of Karma lend support and provide the necessary 'rational' basis for the caste structure. But it was by a psychological warfare through successive generations that those outside the caste-graded society were assimilated into the system to be victims of caste thus branding them as 'polluted untouchables'. These peoples who had first resisted and refused to be assimilated into the Hindu fold at the bottom of the social pyramid were eventually forced into slavery not only physically but also mentally and spiritually. This made them accept and internalise the myth of their destiny as having been determined by their own *Karma* of their previous *Jenma*. Thus of all the four segments of the population entering into the Christian Church these so-called 'untouchables' and out-caste populations have come to have markedly different kind of problems even after coming into the fold of the Church. It is the problem of not being accepted as being equal as

human beings by the other segments of the population who has also entered into the fellowship of the Christian Church. Thus, the real issue with the caste-system is that it denies spiritual equality to the out-caste segments of the population in this country whether inside or outside the Church. And even after coming into the Christian Church the different segments of population continue to carry, not only in their mind and conscience but also deep in their soul and spirit the different caste or out-caste identities. These identities or stampings leave different types of markings on their souls within different segments of the population. In the case of the upper castes and even the fourth graded Sudhras, their caste identity continues even after becoming Christians and leaves that mark in their souls or spirits that gives them a sense of pride, inherited privilege and status carried from their birth. But in the case of out-caste untouchables and tribals, their out-caste identity leaves an equally powerful mark on their souls and spirits which however gives them a sense of shame and despondency. Indeed they are dominated by a sense of unconscious guilt for unforgiven sins (Karma) which they are supposed to have committed during their previous cycles of birth (Jenma) and which is supposed to have caused their destiny (Vidhi = fate) to be born as out-castes, untouchables and tribals. Consequently, unlike the upper caste and Sudhra segments of the Christian population, the out-caste untouchable and tribal segments of the population even after their conversion into the Christian faith continue to suffer what I would call a pollution in their souls or a 'wounded psyche'. This particular, specific and unique problem or the serious handicap suffered by the out-caste peoples has not been so far recognised or identified at all by any of those who want to study or serve these most oppressed and least of the people in our land. It is a mistaken analysis to identify poverty as the central problem of the out-caste peoples. Poverty is only a consequence and an outgrowth of the deeper problem which I had described as the wounded psyche. To be sure, economic deprivations, political powerlessness, cultural depravity and social degradation are real and urgent problems of the out-castes. And yet, the root cause for all these problems needs to be recognised as stemming from the pollution in their soul, or their *wounded psyche* which needs to be first attended to. This would call for going beyond cultural education, whether it is formal or non-formal, and even going beyond 'conscientisation' even when it is understood as education for Liberation. The condition of the *wounded psyche* of our brothers and sisters of out-caste groups would call for nothing less than a programme for healing or 'catharsis' of the inner being of each of these our brothers and sisters as also their community consciousness. Only the deep can call unto the deep. And I believe only a deep understanding of the Christian faith can lead the church to bringing an indepth level healing and salvation to the deeply wounded brothers and sisters who are viewed and treated as 'out-castes' and as 'untouchables' even within the fold of the Church.

5. What then should be the shape and form of the Church's concern for the Dalit Christians? I congratulate the CBCI and the Catholic Church in India for their initiatives like the above described actions for a deeper level concern for the Christians of Scheduled Castes origin (Dalits). It is true the Protestant wing of the Indian Church had also taken several initiatives in the past 3 or 4 decades since Independence for bringing economic and social justice for the Christians of Scheduled Castes origin. It is true the National Council of Churches of India representing some 25 Protestant Church denomi-

nations had often joined hands with several Catholic and Protestant lay peoples organisations and had presented more than 30 representations to the successive Prime Ministers in this country on behalf of the Dalit Christians. It is true that some individual Churches and new Joint Councils like the CSI, CNI and Mar Thoma Joint Council and also the Lutheran and Methodist churches had individually and severally taken action making periodical statements on behalf of the Dalit Christians. It is true that some individual churches like the CSI and Church related organisations like the CISRS created Study cells and carry on research for identifying the problems and finding solutions to the plight of Dalit Christians. But it is also true that all these initiatives and actions, statements and study programmes and even political demonstrations as done particularly by the Madras diocese in a massive way, all these are being on behalf of the Christians of Scheduled Castes origin. In the final analysis all the efforts cannot but be objectively adjudged as being 'Symbolic tokenism' often for the basic reason that these initiatives and actions taken were all 'on behalf of' these 'unfortunate' fellow-Christians rather than 'emanating from' the victims themselves.

To be sure, the Indian Church has the fellowship of believers in the one Christ had the inescapable role and responsibility for the liberation of Dalit (which in Sanskrit, literally means 'oppressed') Christians who are also fellow-believers within the fold of the same Church. But this role must go beyond expressions of 'symbolic tokenism'. This role must take responsibility for *being in solidarity with the victims* of caste-discrimination and oppression. This responsibility must issue out in the Church as a community and as each Christian brother or sister individually taking conscious steps to change old attitudes to caste and victims of caste and thus breakdown the barriers and fences that remain as obstacles to mutual love and acceptance. '*Being in solidarity with the victims*' is the role the Church has to learn from its Lord and Master, the Christ crucified. He hung on the cross not 'on behalf of the victims' but Himself as the victim, indeed as an Innocent victim '*in solidarity with*' all victim people of all ages.

6. Perhaps a *paradigm case* from the Gospel record can help delineate the possible role of 'being in solidarity with the victim' for the Church in India. There is the incident of healing a paralysed man (Mark 2 : 1-12) at the small town of Capernaum. Jesus was preaching inside a house to a packed crowd of people. A paralysed man was brought by four of his friends for Jesus to heal him. Jesus was impressed with the *faith* of these four men that could laugh at all the barriers. These men had the compassion and the courage to be 'in solidarity with the victim' of paralysis that had long crippled not only the body but also the mind and spirit of that patient who might have lost faith in getting healing a long time ago, possibly suffering with his own 'wounded psyche'. The Gospel as the record of the early church goes on to say that seeing the faith of the four men, Jesus proceeded to heal the paralytic. Indeed the process of healing (catharsis) had already begun in the various steps of barrier-crossing taken by the four men of faith, (or the community of faith) 'in solidarity with the victim' of paralysis. We can imagine the paralytic himself resisting initial moves of the four men who had to find a stretcher, then carry him some distance and when at the door of the house where Jesus was to find only the impossibilities and obstacles and barriers each of which however the

(Contd. on p. 15)

A VISIT TO CHINA

BISHOP SUNDAR CLARKE

It was November 1983 in East Germany. It was a cool day when a good modern bus was taking delegates to the Birth place of Martin Luther and to celebrate his 500th birthday. It was also a journey to the birth of a new friendship, a new relationship between the Churches of China and the Churches of India, God's people of China and God's people of India. One of the Bishops from the Church of South India sat with Bishop H. K. Ting of China and began talking, sharing their Christian convictions and concerns and exploring the possibilities of renewing Christian love and Partnership. Bishop Ting, a renowned Church leader and national leader accepted our invitation and made a journey to India with 10 Chinese church leaders which was reciprocated by 10 Indian Church leaders visiting the beautiful land of China in April 1986.

The delegation selected by National Council of Churches in India consisted of Bishop S. K. Parmar, President, NCCI, Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios of Syrian Orthodox Church, Bishop Chandu Lal of the Church of North India, Bishop Jacob Jayaseelan of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rev. K. I. Aier, General Secretary, Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India, Rev. Dr. M. J. Joseph, Principal, MarThoma Theological College, Kottayam, Mr. E. D. Devadasan, of Church of South India (Advocate, Madras), Capt. (Miss) Naomi Lalngaihawmi of Salvation Army, Manipur, Mrs. Navamonie Peter, President, All India Council of Women's Work, Mrs. A. S. Parmar, Ex-Secretary, Council of Christian Schools in India, Rev. Dr. G. R. Singh, Secretary, National Council of Churches in India and Bishop Sundar Clarke of the Church of South India.

The 12 person delegation left Delhi on the 14th of April and arrived in Guangzhou (China) on the 16th. The well arranged programme by the China Christian Council consisted of visits to Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing and Nanjing. The delegation took off for home on the 30th of April.

Republic of China

China is the world's most populated Nation with over a billion people. It is believed that every fourth person in the world is Chinese. They appeared to us a country with political and economic progress. Their political ideology is of the Marxist order though till the 1950's their leanings were more towards Russia. They now have their own brand of Communist ideology. There is no private ownership of property. The management of rural areas is in the hands of communes, however incentives are given to farmers in the form of allotting more land for collective production. The earnings of people are fairly evenly distributed and the income gap between the Company Director and

Company labourer is marginalized. There is little or no difference between the boss and his worker. Even highly professionalized skills like those of doctors, engineers, etc. are fixed in a salary structure compatible with the gains of the proletariat. It appeared to us that people are paid alike, dressed alike and even looked alike! Even house rents are unbelievably low. The monthly rent for a two-bed roomed house is about 7 yen and for a three-bed roomed house about 9 yen. The average monthly income is about 80 yen and men and women work and are treated equal in the wage structure. After retirement they get about 75% of their last income.

Style of Life

Life both urban and rural, is marked by simplicity and straight forwardness. One could hardly see pomp and show. There is no rat race for jobs and money. Every one goes about his or her chores with swiftness, alertness and contentment. There is orderliness in the Chinese way of life, which is not to be confused with regimentation. If it is orderliness in life, then political, social and economic regimentation may be regarded as a positive instrument, yielding positive results. Within the order of society there is also freedom. It is not a rigidly deterministic society. Though we are averse to the word regimentation, we need to see its value from a different angle. The result of this system is seen in the total absence of corruption. Crime and delinquency in public life is dealt with ruthlessly. We see no sign of poverty or hunger and among the nearly million people we bumped into, there was not a single soul soliciting financial help. Begging for money was not to be seen.

The simple life style is also reflected in the very few cars that people own (perhaps largely owned by the expatriates of China). The young and old cycle along cheerfully and throngs of people walk in an orderly way on the pavements. In China we see people everywhere, yet the roads are well maintained, spotlessly clean and neat. No littering, no spitting, no open excrementitious site. Here is a country larger than India much cleaner with an environment maintained spotlessly tidy. Many people are employed to keep the streets clean and are in constant vigil maintaining the environment.

Like us in India, the Chinese eat a lot of rice. Chopsticks are used for spoon and fork. In Chinese food nothing is unclean as in Peter's vision. They eat anything from chicken to sea-weeds. At the end of every meal tea is served to tone up the digestive system.

Working People

The Chinese could be described as a working people. They work hard and work well. There is little of sloth or laziness we came across. They are an industrious group of people. They work hard on their political ideologies and see them permeate the life of the people. We did not hear about 'corrupt politics'. They are a working people, working out their economic prosperity and progress. Production on the vast areas of land was capitalized without being capitalistic. This appealed to us, people from an Indian Democracy. With vast land and with God operating in nature the conditions for growing wheat, rice, vegetables were favourable. The vast coastal areas provided the fish, prawn and the variety of sea foods. We missed seeing much of cattle and fresh milk appeared rather a rare commodity. Milk powder was freely used. The non-availability of fresh milk bore no evidence on the children. The Urban children we saw looked delightful and cute. They were sweet little dolls, decked, dressed and draped in delight.

They also worked hard on their social stability. The family is a strong unit of Society. Divorces are few and far between and rarely heard of. The joint family system is not unheard of, though it is slowly going out of fashion. The state assumes the role of the family and takes good care of the aged. Human dignity and dignity for work comes alive within the social strata. People treat each other with respect and the worker and Manager in the factory look alike!! and dress alike. If we ever attempted to tip a waiter he would look upon us despisingly. He would perhaps quip within himself 'why should I be tipped, I am his equal. I need no condescending yen'. There was no hanging around for tips and waiting for an extra buck. The waiter was paid by the management with dignity, treated with dignity and behaved and served with dignity. His job was dignified and well worked out. The social values and norms were well worked out. We never ever heard of corruption or bribery. Within the social structure the respect and fear for the law was very perceptible. Rape, murder, crime, terrorism are non-existent words in their social dictionary. They are also working on illiteracy. China's illiteracy rate has been reduced from 80% in 1949 (a significant year in Chinese history) to 23.6% in 1982. When they say that education is compulsory, they mean it. The people who did not have much education during the cultural revolution and before are anxious to be better academics. The newspaper 'China Daily' in its issue on the 26th April 1986 reported that more than 60,000 people in Beijing who were official heads took College degree courses and in that city alone 20,000 graduated. Discipline was a Part of education. Again one of the Dailies reported that eight students at Beijing Polytechnic University hostel were sent home to be day students for one to three months because on inspection of their rooms, it was found to be dirty and unclean.

Whether a national characteristic or not, I do not know but I can only say what I saw. In the factories we visited (tea, shipyard, silk) we had an indication of people's attitude to work. Every worker in every one of the factories was absolutely undisturbed and unperturbed by the various visitors that passed by. Every worker was glued to his or her job and never got distracted by the variety of people that passed by. Well, even, the Indian ladies with their sarees was no sight to be drawn into. They worked with devotion.

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Women were very common workers with equal opportunities. There is no child labour. Hard work and disciplined devotion to duty was noticed in the Acrobatics we saw. The exquisite and artistic balancing of body and things was indicative of hard work.

They appear to be a people working and working out things. In the seminaries we visited, English textbooks were few and theological teachers along with their theological students were working their theology. Biblical studies, and the study of Greek and Hebrew. They appeared to be grappling with the word of God and relating this to the Chinese-ness of the church. They were more interested in Theology (Theos-God, Logos-Word, the word of God) and theories of Theology and the Theologians. The theological teachers worked out and worked together with their students with the few basic English textbooks. Many texts are being translated into Chinese and they don't seem to clamour after the Germans, Americans, English or even the Asians for their theology. They want to understand and interpret God in their Chinese-ness. The Bible is being printed in Chinese and they have their own Chinese hymnal. With the doors being more and more open to the western world, I fear the slow drifting from Chinese-ness to Westernization. I wish the Chinese preserve their precious preserves.

The work of the people is seen in the life of the church. It is people's church with no hierarchic structures. The people belong to a congregation and build the life and witness of that congregation. The church of God is the people of God in that place working out their faith and living out their witness. The people are the quhal (assembly) and the ecclesia (the body of Christ). They often gather together on a Sunday (as well as on other days) worship together, study the word of God together, cook, eat and fellowship together. The Lord's Day is for the Lord's people and they spend most of the day together in fellowship, cleaning up the church and working for the church. This was very reminiscent of the early church (Acts 2:42). They speak of belonging to a post-denominational era.

Arts and Culture

Belonging to the eastern hemisphere one could see certain common strands in the culture, art, music and dance. During our stay at Beijing we are taken to the Chinese Drama Institute before visiting the Ming tombs and the Great Wall of China. The drama institute gave us a true insight into Chinese art, music and culture. The Chinese dance is artistic, singular and corporate, full of movement in every limb. The music is unique with Oriental strains and tonal shrillness. Those who performed the dance often participated in the singing as well. We could perceive a common thread running through dance and gymnastics. At Shanghai we were entertained by an acrobatic show. Their effort was splendid and execution of the art was disciplined and delightful.

Religion in China

One has the impression that religious freedom is non-existent or curbed in China. We visited many places of worship and many church leaders but never did we feel the much talked about political infringement on religious liberty. Perhaps religious freedom is expressed within the established norms of the political life there. Religious freedom in China is not

curbed and the churches are ever growing. It was reported to us that since 1978, 4,000 new churches have reopened. Many of the churches used as godowns, factories, workshops, etc., during the cultural revolution are being given to Christians for worship. The renewal efforts made after the cultural revolution have been blest, sanctioned and guided by the Spirit of God.

Protestantism is one among the five religions of China, the other four being Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, Tao-ism and Islam. We had a glimpse into the Roman Catholic Church. Interestingly enough it is cut away from Rome and therefore has its own struggles. Fu Tieshan in his article 'Witnessing to Christ by Chinese Catholic Clergy and Laity' says 'In the Past five years, the church has been advancing while recovering itself... There were more than ten thousand attendances at the Christmas 1980 celebrations in Shanghai. More than twenty thousand people made the 1981 pilgrimage to Zose (Sheshan). On Christmas Eve 1980 in Fushun, Liaoning Province, the church members put on a traditional Christmas play and Santa Clause distributed candy and gifts to the children. On Easter Sunday 1981, there were more than 8,000 attendances at the Cathedral and St. Joseph's Church in Beijing, a Bishop celebrating solemn high mass at each of these two churches.

The Protestant Churches in China

There is no organic union as in the Church of North India or the Church of South India, but there is functional unity among the different churches in China. In the churches which we visited, which were largely urban, traditions and denominations were words of the past. The bulk of the people have a free church style of worship with a lot of congregational participation. Every worship service was crowded with people and people from various denominational backgrounds worshipped in liveliness and orderliness. Even the seventh-day adventist and Salvation Army formed part of a local congregation.

I would like to describe some impressions of a worship service in which I took part. From the solemn dignified Choral Call to worship we all sang the opening hymn. Singing is with heart, voice and soul. Then came the Pastoral Prayer. I could not follow much of it but it was very obvious that the Pastor and the people were praying together. In the two worship services I attended the Pastoral prayers sounded so meaningful. It was not a rhetorical solo but people involving themselves and participating in the pastoral prayer as in every other aspect of worship. The Pastor would perhaps pray for a particular cause and sections of the congregation would resound an Amen. There were soft echos of Hallelujah wafting through the vibrant Pastor's prayer. The people were listening to the prayers, participating and involved in the act. Every prayer need expressed aloud by the Pastor would have a soft or loud Yes, Lord, so let it be, Amen. This made the Pastoral prayer, the Pastor and the people offering their petitions and intercessions to God, very meaningful.

Like in India, the Chinese church still depends heavily on the translated western hymns. Choirs that we saw were dressed in western attire! According to Rev. Peter Cia, a talented musician and a pastor for over 50 years (Mrs. Cia being the choir director and

composer of Chinese lyrics) only one-fourth of one Chinese hymnal comprise Chinese lyrics and three-fourths are translations of Western hymns. Speaking for myself, I would like to hear and listen to more Chinese lyrics. With the skills and talents available there needs to be more expressions of the Christian Faith in the local culture and art. Our gracious kind and able Pastor Shi Qigui who accompanied us all through our Chinese journey is another able Chinese lyric composer. We were privileged to receive a copy of their hymnal.

Some observations of the Church in China

The whole Indian delegation was treated with great respect, dignity and courtesy. Of course, there were some things that we would have liked to see more of. We felt we did not have a sufficient exposure to rural life in China and we did not have enough of opportunities to mingle and rub shoulders with the common man of China. We were treated with such dignity that we lost sight of the common man and his life. The Rev. Shen Yi Fan, Vice-Chairman of the Shanghai Christian Council brought to our attention some of the problems in the Chinese church. There was the age gap in the ministry which was perhaps an aftermath of the cultural revolution. It is hoped that more young people will enter the ministry of the church and this age gap in the ministry would be bridged. This necessarily brought alive the problem of Pastoral care. There is a great need for pastoral care in the Churches of China. A serious attempt is being made in the church to produce more Christian literature. Another area that needs looking into in the Chinese church is for the church of China to realise it is a part of the Universal Church. The Chinese-ness so strong in the Chinese Christians should not blur the ecumenical horizons around and they should see their people as a part of God's people in the world. Chinese theology should be within their own context and also God at work in the world. The loosely knit federated unity in the churches of China needs further structuring and being fitted into a stronger national net work. These are some suggestions that I would like to offer to the Chinese church. Their constant emphasis of belonging to a post-denominational era is praiseworthy.

The Three Self-movement

The Chinese church has been unique, distinctive and has contributed much to the universal church having suffered under colonial rule and the fear of Japanese domination. The Chinese church offers something most valuable to the third world churches and particularly to churches with a poor socio-economic background in the words of Chen Zemin. 'Now, thanks to the three self-movement, a truly Chinese Church having rid herself of western domination and tutelage, increasingly identified with and accepted by the Chinese people, is emerging. The historic social setting is entirely new. One-fourth of the world's population has embarked on building an independent socialist country. Chinese Christians, while working shoulder to shoulder with our compatriots in this common task, are sincerely trying to relate the Christian faith and commitment to the great experience the Chinese people are going through. Our church is as yet small and young, and we have many problems and difficulties, but we can say now that there is a Chinese Church, a 'church' coming of age, not quite in the ecclesiological sense, but a viable community committed to the Christian faith. During

the three decades of struggle and experimentation, we have gained some theological insights that we would like to share with our fellow Christians abroad'.

The Three self-Movement is a clear expression of the 'Chinese-ness' of the church in China. Bishop K. H. Ting the internationally known and respected Chinese church leader explained to us the place of the Three Self-Movement. He has given a crypt description about this in this article 'Rationale for three-self.'

At the time of China's Liberation in 1949 the number of Protestants was not more than 7,00,000. Today, 34 years after the launching of three self-movement the number of Protestant Christians has gone up to three million (according to a conservative estimate). People of course have become Christians out of many different circumstances, but the one underlying reason is that, today, the church in China has shed much of its western image. Its chinese-ness is not only apparent in the personnel, the leadership and in its final support, but also growing in ways of expressing the Christian faith in its thought and the freedom of its worship.

Bishop K. H. Ting says

'Ours is not a church running educational, medical and philanthropic institutions, nor one possessing sophisticated means of communication, but it is clearly an evangelistic and growing church. Christians are witnessing in places where they live and where they work. Now that the stigma of being a western religion has pretty much been removed and people no longer say 'one more Christian, one less Chinese', men and women in various walks of life are more willing to hear what Christianity is all about. The whole experience tells us that a church has to earn its right to be heard.

Three self is not generally anti-missionary. We are thankful to God for the gospel of Jesus Christ missionaries brought to China and for all the good they did in China. We make a distinction between Christian obedience to the Great Commission of Christ as given in Matthew 28 and the political, economic and military

expansion of western colonialism. But while we do think there is a time for Christians to go from one country to another to preach the gospel, we do think too there is a time for them not to go so that the church established there can come of age and be itself. Since the reopening of China many old China missionaries have been back to visit around and we are so glad to find them appreciating and endorsing the Three-self principle and thanking God for it with us.'

Conclusion

We felt that the leadership in the Chinese church was of top quality. There is never an indication of power crazy leadership. Everyone is a people's leader, a people's man. The Church in China, is the Church of God with the people of God and for the people of God. As Katharine B. Hockin puts it the church in China is the movement of the Holy Spirit from 'Church to the World' to 'Church for the World'. I pay my tributes to the committed and dedicated leadership of Bishop K. H. Ting, the Rev. Han Wenzao (Chairperson, Board of Directors, Nanjing YMCA, Associate General Secretary, National 3-Self-Committee, Chairperson, Jiangsu and Nanjing 3-Self-Committee). They and others in the 3-self-movement are doing a tremendous job. Pastor Shi Qigui who accompanied us all through the tour showed great sense of leadership and he deserves a special word of thanks. We should also express our very sincere and grateful thanks to the Christian Council of China and its President and General Secretary for the excellent arrangements made for us. Everywhere we received VIP treatment and the warmth, hospitality and generosity of the Chinese Christians cannot be sufficiently described. They showered on us love, kindness, generosity and the Christian Faith.

As we were travelling by train from Guangzhou to Hong Kong, we uttered praise and thanksgiving to God for a people so ancient in their civilisation and so progressive in socio-economic and political affairs. We saw the Chinese church blossoming in self-hood, self-dignity and self-respect. The land of China and the Church have a message for the world and Church today. May God bless our partnership and further our Christian love and togetherness.

National Consultation of CDLM

(March 16, 1986, Bangalore)

General Secretary's Welcome Address

I am happy to welcome all of you—Bishops, Clergy and other leaders of the Church, scholars, academicians, activists, journalists and my dear Dalit brothers and sisters to the Second Annual National Consultation of the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement (CDLM). I must extend a warm personal welcome to Mr. James Mutambirwa, Programme Secretary of the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism. He travelled half the globe to be with us during these days as an expression of solidarity with our concerns.

Let me also welcome the distinguished speakers who have kindly agreed to participate in the deliberations and the sessions. Also, all of you for having taken time off from your work and travelled to be with us.

Permit me to dwell briefly on the theme of the consultation. We have chosen the theme 'Struggles and Hopes of Christian Dalits in India Today'. The key words are 'struggles' and 'hopes'. They signify the state of affairs we are caught up in today.

We are living in a caste-ridden society—a society which believes that people are made different, should live different, die different and that after death take another life according to their karma of the past birth. It is a society which regards human beings as belonging to pre-determined orders of high and low births. It is also a society that believes that there are things which are ritually unclean and as well as physically unpleasant. It was E. M. Forster who once said, 'Really it takes the human mind to evolve anything so devilish'.

Christianity attracted many Dalits in India for a number of reasons—social emancipation, economic and educational benefits and, above all, the liberating gospel of Jesus of Nazareth who received and redeemed all people irrespective of caste or colour. But the Missionaries who brought this gospel of 'amazing universalism and its divine origin' unfortunately became victims of this devilish caste bias. As a result we still see casteism perpetuated openly in some churches and subtly in many others. Over 80% of the Christians in India today belong to Dalit background. Surprisingly they are kept in the background by the less than 20% of the Christians of upper caste origin. In many ways they are discriminated: Separate places in pews, separate hearse and burial grounds, less than 5% intercaste marriages, segregated churches, caste titles in name boards and in church and secular documents are some of the visible and identifiable forms of discrimination. Even after many years of preaching and praying the situation has not changed. If at all, they have changed for the worse mainly owing to the rising consciousness of the Christian Dalits.

The Christian Dalits are bored with the meaningless sermons of our preachers. By believing in the doctrine of karma they have stooped enough and more, they are born as 'panchamas' and 'milachas' and the preachings

of the Christian fundamentalists have only made them submissive and enduring and at times, rendered them incapable of struggling to achieve their earthly rights. The message of the Kingdom of God is meaningless to them.

Frustrated and indignant by all these, the Christian Dalits now shout slogans such as 'keep caste out of the church or you keep out of the church'. Now the churches in India appear to be concerned about some of the issues but not totally committed to the cause of the struggling people. The churches are only willing to share the words of Jesus but are afraid of being wounded like Jesus to liberate the Dalits; they offer only lip service and not soul-force.

The Constitution of India guarantees equality to all, including Dalits, who have been, for centuries, discriminated against and denied equality and human dignity by the rest of the society.

The Constitution also prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Article 25 guarantees the right to freedom of conscience and freedom to profess and practise any religion. The reality of human equality as against the might of verbal equality offered to these Dalits is only a mockery of the Constitution. When will this word-deed gap disappear? It can only disappear when the Dalits become the conscious proletariat and stand up as one indivisible force to fight the oppression that is heaped upon them. The dawning of Dalit consciousness marks the beginning of attaining constitutional justice in our country.

Let me illustrate my point a bit further. Albert and Arumugam are two Dalits living in the same segregated cheries, under the same roof, working for the same master for meagre wages. They suffer the same discrimination of untouchability. But Albert and his family are denied all welfare benefits simply because they have embraced Christianity. Their children go to the same school; one gets scholarship, uniform, priority in admission but for the other these are denied. Both the brothers go to the same bank to obtain loan; one gets a subsidised loan and for the other, it is denied. The assumption behind this discrimination is that the change of religion has changed his socio-economic-educational, and even political conditions. If Albert is reconverted to Hinduism, he becomes eligible for all benefits.

In a Supreme Court case a Christian Dalit's election to Lok Sabha was challenged. The Court held that the person was not a practising Christian and therefore his election is not valid. If a Christian stops practising his religion, does it make him a Hindu immediately? It is difficult to understand the logic behind such a verdict. For the sake of these welfare benefits many have reconverted to Hinduism and many more are Hindus according to secular documents. But many of them also maintain their membership in the church. There are thousands of rural Christian Dalits who do not know what they have

lost and what they are losing by opting to be practising Christians. They pay a high price for holding on to their faith. One can say that the Government of India is probably the largest reconversion movement in India today. By granting these welfare benefits in a discriminatory manner, they are tempting the poor Christians to go back to the fold of Hinduism.

Did Christian Dalits ever enjoy any special political privilege during the Missionary days or in the days of British Raj? Why were they denied this privilege? There are now 42 Christian MPs in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha and not even one among them hails from the Christian Dalit background. Why? you do not find them even in State Assemblies. Why are they treated as second class citizens?

The Churches and the elite Christians run educational institutions availing privileges under the minority rights guaranteed in the constitution. Not even 10% of its students are Christian Dalits. 80% of the Christian minority are denied a fair share even in the Church-administered institutions. Hospitals are no exception, Christian Dalit employees of these institutions are often treated like bonded labour. The minority rights have nothing to offer to Christian Dalits.

Politically powerless, economically weak, socially segregated, the Christian Dalits are struggling for justice, equal rights and freedom of worship. Many of them are in the villages living in ignorance; when will they know the truth? They are the sheep without shepherd, the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned and the sick. They are the thirsty and the strangers on their native soil.

How will these 15 million people be conscientized and organized? How can these people be united? Unless a solidarity is built among them, will they be strong to fight and secure their freedom? Where will they search for religious and political directions? They need courageous and dedicated leaders intellectual and deeply committed leaders capable of organizing them for justice and freedom. The present nightmare must be changed to dreams—dreams of hope! Not only have dreams but be willing to pay the price for making those dreams come true.

For this, they must have the knowledge of and respect for their own history and culture. They must know that they are the sons of the soil, owners of this great land. All these will lead to their unity and solidarity. Unless the Dalits know their past and present how can they have dreams for their future?

We are sure this consultation will help us renew and strengthen to combat the evil of caste and open new avenues for conscientizing, organizing and liberating the least of our brothers and sisters.

ARISE ! AWAKE !! REBUILD !!!

With these words of hope I welcome all of you to join us in our journey to freedom and true equality.

—JAYAKARAN JOSEPH,
Courtesy—SAMATA—2/1986,
—CISRS Publication.

CDLM National Convention

(March 18-19, 1986 Bangalore)

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am indeed privileged, proud and very pleased to greet you all, on this happy occasion of the first anniversary of the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement. We have had an eventful year, testing and seeing the goodness of our god in Jesus Christ, who has blessed and enlarged our humble efforts towards establishing our work in the various regions of our country. I am grateful to my fellow office-bearers, for working together as a team to commit us all, in greater measure and with greater understanding, to the cause of all Dalits through our specific involvement with the Christian Dalits. This address too reflects collective thinking and effort. Despite mixed reactions of certain church leaders and initial hesitation of other friends in the Dalit cause, we have been able to, through our many dialogues, writing in Christian journals and reporting in secular newspapers, impress on the churches, Christian communities and the public on the need to awaken to the issues and to support the aspirations of Indian Christian Dalits, who groan and cry under a peculiar bondage within our society and our churches.

Talking about some of the 'current captivities' in Asia, the outgoing General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, Bishop Yap Kim Hao mentioned during his report to the Assembly at Seoul, 'Other minority problems surface in different countries in our region. The Dalits who are also known as Scheduled Castes, Outcasts and Untouchables have recently formed a Christian Dalit Liberation Movement in India to free themselves from being the targets of discrimination.....' and further said, 'The "servanthood of the Church" needs to be lived out amidst these realities. Neither an other-worldly stance nor a privatised faith can address the problems facing Asia.....' Closer to home, the Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in his report to the Biennial Council at New Delhi said 'We deem it to be a great privilege to have been of some assistance to what is perhaps the most significant movement within the Church in India today'. These two statements by our enlightened friends highlight the primary task of the CDLM to 'awaken and challenge the churches to the issues and aspirations of the poor and

marginalised in general, and to motivate them to become involved in the development of the Christian Dalits in particular, encouraging and co-operating with them in their moral, spiritual, socio-political and economic life'. Considering that the Indian church is predominantly constituted by Christians of Dalit background, and also considering the sacramental significance of the poor, the outcastes and the oppressed it is right to call upon the Church (and ourselves/as part of the Church) to fulfil its servant role, in self-emptying service to marginalised people.

We met together as representatives of the Christian Dalits, in the first National Convention at New Delhi, exactly a year ago. The theme of the Conference, 'In the struggles of the least of my brothers and sisters', inspired many of us to openly identify and declare ourselves as Christian Dalits, affirming that being 'Dalit is Dignified' (a watchword coined by Prof. Ranjan Babu and adopted by the Convention), and to acknowledge the implicit and explicit sufferings of our lowlier brothers and sisters in the Church as well as in Society, and to commit themselves to serve their cause unceasingly.

The designation, 'Christian Dalits' was adopted (in preference to calling ourselves, Dalit Christians or Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin) in view of the liberation consciousness, sense of community and wider solidarity conveyed by it. The word, Dalit was used in its wider connotation, to relate to *all the oppressed*, and to the whole Dalit community. In keeping with this understanding the first convention set up the immediate tasks for the CDLM as (a) evolving a national strategy for creating a network of Christian Dalit associations transcending sub-caste divisions and local rivalries, (b) establishing regional, district and local councils composed of representatives of churches and of Christian Dalit groups to seek for economic and social justice, and (c) combating casteism within the church and society. It is for this convention to evaluate these objectives and activities arising therefrom.

We have set for ourselves, in this Convention the task of formulating an ideology and of clarifying a vision for the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement. This is a forward step in the right direction, for theory and practice form a dialectical unity; just as much as ideology and theology form; for us Christian Dalits, a dialectical unity. The draft paper on the ideology and vision for the CDLM will be presented to us soon which makes further comment superfluous. We are glad that our conscientisation during the Consultation with the Churches, held immediately before this Convention, has prepared us better to deal with the question of ideology and vision.

Political discrimination of Christian Dalits

It was a sad day when the minority rights of Indian Christians, the majority of whom have come into the churches from scheduled caste communities, were surrendered without foresight by the upper caste/class representatives to the Constituent Assembly during 1947-49, yielding to class interests (?) and the wily machinations of the nationalist leaders of the majority community. It was at this time also that the scheduled castes were taken off the minority list and given special reservations. The presidential Order of 1950 completed the elimination of Christians of scheduled caste origin from the scheduled castes and denied them statutory benefits. This denial of welfare benefits to Christians of scheduled caste origin is a violation of fundamental rights and is a clear case of discrimination and injustice, based on religion. Even if it is argued that the Order of 1950 only affirmed the

Government of India Act of 1935 (passed under the British rule) which specified that 'no Indian Christian shall be deemed to be a member of the scheduled caste', it must not be forgotten that despite the religious criterion used, the Indian Christians enjoyed political reservation then. To argue that Christianity did not accept caste and not to have passed a complementary legislation to make social (caste) oppression of Christian converts punishable under law, is an exercise of deceit. The Christian leaders did not realise the contradiction of the President's Order in terms of the Hindu bias which belie the secular nature of the State, until too late. Since 1950, there have been innumerable representations to the Prime Ministers and the Government, by Heads of Churches, lay leaders which have not been heeded on the ground that the law does not recognise Scheduled Caste Christians, and therefore the Government can do nothing unless the law is changed. But, this is the big question, will the law be changed? Ever since the 1930s, conversions to non-Hindu religions have been viewed by the majority community as political and economic issues which would weaken them. And hence, the reservations to SCs, conditionally, for remaining Hindus, even as outcastes.

Prof. P. J. Kurien, M. P. had introduced in the Parliament, a Bill, as a private member for Amendment of para 3 of the President's Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950. This was taken up for consideration on December 22, 1983 and again on February 24, 1984. After much debate, which cannot be characterised as all fair and free from prejudice. Prof. Kurien as virtually bullied into withdrawing the Bill, under the concerned Minister's displeasure! Where else can one seek to change the law, except in Parliament? And how, we have a sensational judgement, involving Soosai, a Scheduled Caste Christian and, a cobbler, from Madras. Soosai, petitioned against discrimination by the Tamilnadu Khadi and Industries Board of the Government of Madras in not granting him a bunk to carry on his cobbling, on account of being a Christian, and challenged the President's Order of 1950 and the order of the Central Government's Social Welfare Department restricting the benefit only to Hindu cobblers. He also challenged the violation of his fundamental right to practise a religion of his choice and the freedom of conscience granted to him as a Citizen, by the Indian Constitution. The appeal was rejected, ignoring the questions raised about the anti-secular nature of the Order, freedom of religion, and obligatory State aid for the socially and economically backward citizens. On the other hand, the judgement asked for proof that the Scheduled Caste Christians suffered the same depth of social, economic, cultural backwardness and disabilities within Christian community, deserving State intervention!

The fact of the matter is that representations made to the first Prime Minister and President of the Republic of India brought forth their assurance that the President's Order was effective only with regard to the Statutory provisions guaranteed to the Scheduled Castes, but that all State aids and facilities would be available to not only Hindu Scheduled Castes but also to every other educationally and socially backward class whether it professes Hinduism, Christianity or any other religion. So, why was Soosai refused a non-statutory benefit on grounds of his being a Christian? Why does not the Central Government practise what it preaches to the State Governments? Some State Governments seem to be more charitable to the Christian Dalits, than the Centre. But why talk of charity, when the issue is one of justice and righteousness? Our own memorandum submitted to our Prime Minister,

Shri Rajiv Gandhi, as received by him sympathetically with the promise of due attention at a later date. However, soon after we returned home, the Home Ministry sent us a letter saying there were no immediate plans for a review of the matter.

Another dramatic example highlighting the dilemma of Christian Dalits, is the recent horrendous carnage of the Dalits at Karamchedu, Andhra Pradesh. The majority of the victims—men who were murdered and women who were raped, and the community which fled the village and is now resettled on the outskirts of the neighbouring district town were Christian Dalits (affiliated to the Baptist Church). When the Dalits under attack reached the nearby town, they made a beeline to the Lutheran Church Compound and took refuge there for a few days. The first thing they did was to pray, both when they entered and left the church-compound, and when they setup camp at the site of their rehabilitation and future settlement, away from their natal village. The first relief came from Christian friends and voluntary organisations and from innumerable secular Dalit associations. Most of their Camp leaders were Christian Dalits. Yet, from the first moments the atrocity had to be projected as a Dalit atrocity involving Dalit victims. While there was no direct religious reason for the atrocity, the havoc caused to Christian Dalits: their life, work and dignity, could not be highlighted or dealt with, reference to the Christian community, for fear of alienating the sympathy and support of other communities, and of course, the State Government and the ruling party, which is not too friendly to Christian or the Dalits. A rationalist Dalit took over the leadership of the victimised Dalits at the earliest opportunity, and connived with radicals and others to suppress every Christian element in the tragedy and to obstruct the entry of Christian organisations and church leaders to make contact with the victims or to aid them directly. He refused to identify with any of their Christian sentiments or need for fellowship. The politicians fully exploited the situation to their own ends, and played heartless games to woo the victimised community's political affection!

As for the churches, they could not do much more than handover money and materials for relief. We have it on good authority that the inter-church coordination committee has not yet agreed upon the priorities for assistance to the largely Christian Dalit community under resettlement near Chirala. At least, some church leaders agree about the need to build a community centre for conscientisation of these and other Dalits, but the strangle hold of the secular ideologies is strong enough to obstruct the Christian attempt to play a meaningful role. However, it must be acknowledged that the Church of South India Medak Diocese took the lead in holding a public meeting at Secunderabad and issued radical appeals for protection of human rights and of the marginalised Dalits in particular. The Christian community as a whole could not intervene with the State Government to appoint an impartial enquiry into the atrocity, headed by a High Court Judge. Nor did the ruling party or the opposition take initiative in the matter; in fact, they neutralised the whole effort. Now the matter is before the District Courts which virtually means that money and caste/class power will win the day and the Dalits will be slowly and surely betrayed, making worm wood of justice. The CDLM itself closely related to the Karamchedu victims. Apart from a small donation to the Action Committee, we have held in association with CARDS and CISRS a Dalit Writers' Workshop to reflect on Karamchedu and the aftermath, the findings of which will be published in a special issue of SAMATA, the caste-class documentation journal of CISRS. Much of the conscientisation is being carried on indirectly.

Christian Dalits and the Churches

It is a matter of deep concern and shame for us, that discriminations of Christian Dalits and casteism, are basic evils found in the life of our churches. While there is no theological sanction or ecclesiastical policy for the practice of caste, caste considerations underlie the conduct and relationships between the various sections and sectors of the church policy. The scandal of 'caste' churches, separate seating for Christian Dalits, separate congregations based on sub-caste communities, separate cemeteries, and occasionally separate communions and seminaries for the Christian Dalits, often belie the claims of fellowships and equality within the church, and its mission of witness and unity in Jesus Christ. The Churches, are conscious of the pernicious effects of caste and class at the highest levels but in reality very little is done at the local or parish levels, to combat casteism and other divisive forces. The educated elite of our churches often deny the existence of caste system within the churches, but they have little hesitation to use their caste-affiliations to secure position of power or to observe caste relationships in social intercourse, i.e., marriage.

It is an encouraging sign that the several Church Councils have come to recognise the evils of caste within the churches and are determined to fight against them. In January 1974, the Catholic Bishops have said in their recommendations, 'It is a matter of concern that the phenomenon of castes and communities, characterised by their divisive structures, is sometime present and operative in the life of the church in India in diverse forms. This fact weakens the witness to unity as desired by Christ' 'We shall have to fight relentless battle against all forces of disruption which are found in our communities, among the clergy, in religious families, and in any sphere of the life of the Church'. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India recommended in their January 1978 meeting, 'to struggle for the removal of discrimination presently practised against Christians of Scheduled caste origin....' The Synod of January 1974, marks a landmark in the social thinking of the church of South India. Among other things, the Synod recommended that the members of the Church should take measures to promote justice in personal and social relationships by fighting the evils of caste and communalism, and also expressed serious concern about the prominent role of caste in church affairs. This concern found concrete expression in the Synod of January 1984, when it set up the Commission for study and action on caste issues. The Joint Council of the Church of South India, the Church of North India and Mar Thoma church in India, in June 84, has made several recommendations on caste issues: (a) that the member Churches become urgently concerned about the plight and problems of the outcaste people (scheduled castes and tribes) both within and outside the Christian fold, as a priority for the Mission of the Church in India. (b) that a Synod level Commission on caste issues be appointed to initiate action programmes for creating self-awareness and self-understanding of their plight and potential that will lead to changing the existing power structures among our rural illiterate and poverty stricken Christian outcaste people to be implemented at the local pastorate or parish level... and (c) that all possible steps be taken to get the obnoxious para 3 of the Presidential Order 19 of 1950 which discriminates against CSCOs, deleted.

The National Seminar on 'Caste and Class' in April 1974, jointly sponsored by the CISRS and WCC-PCR said among other things, '....it is in the context of extreme, economic exploitation and cultural opposition

that the struggle of the people of India for justice and liberation must be understood ... struggles have, therefore, to be waged on many fronts: against ... the obscurantist, unjust and oppressive caste discrimination and for a truly human relationship. ... The Consultation on Churches' Response to Issues and concerns of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origins held at Kottayam, under the auspices of the Kerala Christian Council and in cooperation with the Christian Conference of Asia-Urban Rural Mission desk said that 'we note with deep concern, the inadequacy of programmes to combat casteism in Church and Society over against the enormous economic programmes run by the upper-caste dominated churches in India, promoted by ecumenical bodies, and to request all the churches and church institutions to give employment opportunities and educational preferences to Scheduled caste Christians on proportional reservations.' The Kottayam Conference also resolved that a 'common organisation or a coordination committee should be formed, to fight the discrimination against the peoples of scheduled caste origins, at least in the southern states of India. It is this last resolution of the Kottayam Conference that gave birth to the CDLM.

It is at once clear that the information of the CDLM has taken place amidst long-standing social thinking of our churches and ecumenical bodies, and more so, as a response to the sufferings and hopes of the Christian Dalits. It is in this context that we fail to understand the ambiguity of our Church officials and even their antagonism about the objectives of the CDLM. However, we realise too that we have to read the 'signs of the times' and act boldly in fulfilling our priestly and prophetic tasks of fighting injustice and self-giving/dying to redeem the unjust system. The churches cannot and need not directly engage in social action at every level, whether in or outside the church, and should take the assistance of Christian Social Action groups involved in the promotion of people's struggles for a just, humane and participatory social order. The CDLM has already committed itself to work closely in liaison with the socio-economic and development department of the churches and, the regional/national Church Councils.

The Rise of Hindu Fundamentalism, anti-Christian and anti-Dalit Stances

In recent times, there has been increased activity of Hindu fundamentalists, involving particularly the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. An important feature of these organisations is the propaganda against conversions into non-Hindu religions. Their call is for Hindu unity against the threat of disintegration by Christian and Muslim proselytisation backed by foreign funds. A disquieting feature is the tacit approval of the government officials and their collaboration in promoting the revivalist campaigns (advocating a Hindu Law, a Hindu Dharma, and a Hindu language) which are organised on a massive scale, as a show of strength, by the majority community.

Perhaps the best example of the growth and consequences of Hind fundamentalism, are the tragedies that rocked Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli districts of Tamilnadu in March and June of 1982, at Mandaikadu and Puliangudi. At Mandaikadu (Kanyakumari Dist.) six Christian fishermen of the Mukkuva community were shot and killed by the Police during an alleged clash between Christians and Hindus. At Puliangudi, nine harijans were killed and 21 others injured during a raid by caste-Hindus on the harijans. What is important to note is the stepped

up activity by the RSS and the VHP in the areas surrounding these villages, prior to the occurrence of both the tragedies; The Puliangudi atrocity has been described as a 'brutal reprisal for conversions' and as a conversion backlash' to teach a lesson to harijans for having converted to Islam around Meenakshipuram in February '81. The Mandaikadu clashes were triggered by mounting suspicion and resentment against the growing numbers as Christians (reported as comprising 52% of the district's population). While it is quite legitimate for the Hindus to freely preach, propagate and practise Hinduism, it is a matter of grave concern for the minorities that such militant proselytising campaigns apparently are aimed at denying the same freedom to them to choose and practise the religion of their choice.

Reconversions

The spate of reconversions during the early 80's highlighted particularly by the mass reconversions of Dalits from Hinduism and Christianity to Islam at Meenakshipuram in early 1981, reveal a search of the Dalits for equality of status and self-respect, freedom for economic enterprise, for inter-marriage, for ethical teaching and good pastoral care. The whole question of reconversions, whether as social protest or for economic reasons, ought to become a basic concern of the churches (which has not happened) for it involves that disillusionment with and desertion of the Church by the dalits who form the majority within the churches. Also reconversions exposed they class character of the Christian missions, which alleged neglect the shepherding of the weak and downtrodden, in favour of increasing the power and prestige of the church.

Conclusion

I have tried to present before you the major concerns that affect the life of Christian Dalits all over the country, and the consequent tasks that confront the CDLM within the Indian reality, towards building them up as a free, self-determining, and dynamic community which would become the leaven of humanisation of all the Dalits.

Two questions are being constantly raised by our critics

1. Won't the emphasis on caste by the CDLM bring about division in the churches?
2. What is the relationship of the CDLM to the wider Dalit Movement in India?

For the first question, the answer is a simple, No. The churches are already divided on lines of caste and class. It is the Church Councils that say so, and seek to create avenues for changing the unequal and unjust situations, within the church. The CDLM's concern is only to assist the prophetic and priestly role of the church, to become truly the church of the people, a church of the poor, thus living out the gospel and acting with the power of Christ's Resurrection to overcome the world.

For the second question, the answer is not so simple, but it is there. Many Christian Dalits, whether as part of the CDLM or any other Dalit Christian forum are as individuals, involved in the several local and regional dalit movements; there are staunch Ambedkarites, Marxists (of one hue or the other) and Humanists as well as socially committed Christians among them. The larger Dalit Movement itself as it grows to become an All India Movement will absorb the human struggles of the Christian Dalits. But the Christian Dalits have to seriously engage

themselves in the task of dialogue and common struggle with the wider Dalit Movement to prove total and universal character of their struggles. Some of the tasks facing the wider Dalit Movement in India are : to evolve a national movement that can inspire and initiate revolutionary change in the caste-class character of Indian society ; which would take up the cultural, political as well as economic issues and fight the philosophy of and co-option of the advanced Dalits into the dominant culture and society. The Christian Dalits with the experience of their struggles for justice and equality within the churches and local communities will not hesitate to contribute in great measure to the

advancement and growth of the Dalit Movement as a whole.

May God grant unto us His guidance, care and judgement and lead us out of bondage, even as he led and delivered the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, and like them, make us His Holy people and priesthood, to bring Justice to the poor and the oppressed among us, and deliverance to all the people.

—THE REV. K. J. JOHN

—Courtesy : SAMATA 2/1986

—A CISRS Publication

Church Concerns—(Contd. from p. 5)

faith of the four men could overcome. And finally, it is not even Jesus Who actually effects the healing. Jesus asks the victim Himself to 'get up, take up the mat and go home'—which he promptly does himself. It is true Jesus as Son of Man pronounced forgiveness of sins to the victim not discriminating whether he was 'sinner' or 'sinned against' for both types needed forgiveness of sins. Indeed the son of man had authority to forgive the sins of all men and women, present in that house meeting at Capernaum. The forgiveness of sins declared by Jesus was available both to the paralytic and to the four men whose faith Jesus had appreciated as well as to the Jewish legal experts and critics of Jesus present when the whole process of (Catharsis) healing was taking place.

Now the focal point from this paradigm case for the Indian Church to learn, I would like to think, is that the fact of '*being in solidarity with the victim*' not only by the four men who carried him to Jesus but Jesus Himself '*being in solidarity with the victim*' including in the deeper levels of inner being where '*faith, sin and forgiveness*' operate.

In the end, through a whole process of '*catharsis*' the paralytic victim is empowered and enabled to attain total healing and liberation. Can we not see the emerging role for the Indian Church as '*empowerment*' of the people and as '*Enabling the oppressed victims*' to find the healing and thus *liberate themselves*? May God the Holy Spirit guide and lead the Indian church into all truth. And Jesus said : '*You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free*'.

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Resolutions passed in Synod Working Committee held on July 2-3, 1986

SRI LANKA

The Synod continues to express its deep concern over the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka. The Churches are called upon to have special prayers on Sunday July 27th, 1986 and share with the congregation the issues involved in Sri Lanka so that, a special intercession is offered for a peaceful settlement.

The Church notes with gratification the new proposal for federal sharing of political power put forth by President Jayawardane and express its hope that this would contribute for lasting peace. We appreciate the initiative taken by Hon. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India in pressing for a political settlement of this issue.

The Synod would like to share with all the Churches its concern for the Diocese of Jaffna which is one of our Dioceses. The Bishop in Jaffna, Rt. Rev. Ambalavanar has expressed the prevailing situation in the following words :—

'We feel cut off....daily there is a heavy toll on civilian life, we just ask "How long O'Lord How long?" and continue to pray that there will be a just peace before long'.

We call upon our congregation to continue to pray for the people of Sri Lanka and the Church there.

SOUTH AFRICA

The CSI expresses its solidarity with the African Black majority in South Africa. The CSI strongly condemns the Apartheid policy of the White minority Government and its repressive measures taken against the political and Church leaders.

The Church calls upon the Government of South Africa to immediately release all political prisoners and work towards a just and non-discriminating political system to be evolved for the people of South Africa.

The Synod requests all the dioceses to arrange for special prayers in their Churches for the people of South Africa on Sunday July 27, 1986.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PEACE

The Church of South India celebrates the International Year of Peace 1986, along with the nations and peoples of the whole world. The Church expresses its concern

over the possibility of a nuclear holocaust, Chemical Warfare, or Star-war being perpetrated by the Super Powers in our one world. We call for a total abandoning of these dreadful and suicidal misadventures.

We affirm that this world is created by God for the fruitful habitation of the human beings and other creatures. This is the World for which God sent his Son to be crucified and to redeem. We affirm the power of Resurrection which gives hope to the world in this hopeless situation.

While affirming peace, we call upon the richer nations of the World to share the resources of this world with other nations. Peace includes total well-being and not mere absence of war and for the total well-being of all the peoples of the earth, the evils of discrimination in terms of caste, colour and creed should be forthwith abandoned. The people of the earth are called upon to make this world humane and habitable for all people, so that, they can live in peace and prosperity.

The CSI Synod, calls upon the whole Church to engage in a process of Education with respect to peace and Justice in the local situations. Organise congregations and communities to join together in demonstrating this common concern and involve in programmes that give expression for these issues at the local level.

We call upon all our churches to celebrate this peace year through the following programmes :—

- (a) Arrange for Seminars, Debates, Conferences and Essay competitions, on the theme at various levels of Children, students, elders, women and clergy and at the Diocesan and Regional levels.
- (b) Popularise the peace concerns to the neighbours and people around.
- (c) Observe 'Silence' on 11th of 11th Month of 1986 at 11 a.m. at the Churches and Institutions/Organisations, for 10 minutes followed by an educative lecture on peace concerns.
- (d) Set apart Nov. 16th as peace Sunday where in the worship services the special liturgy prepared by the Synod liturgy committee be used throughout the Dioceses.
- (e) As a Culmination of the celebration of the year of Peace, organise public meetings in the evening of November 16th involving other communities. The Churches with Placards, Banners, Songs etc. which demonstrates the concern for peace.

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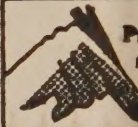
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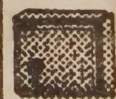
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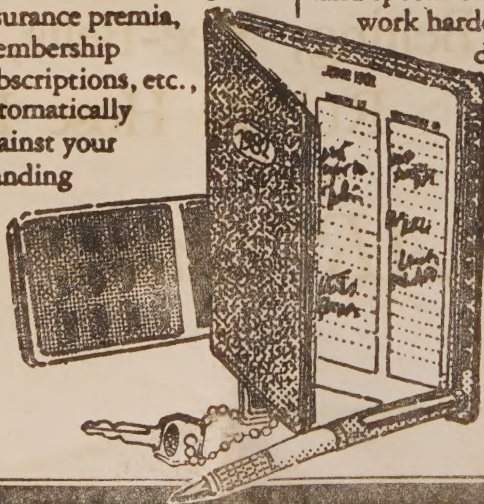
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